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TAGS: [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [CASC](#) [CVIS](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: ABSENCE OF ISRAELI VISAS HINDERS WEST BANK
BUSINESSES

REF: A. TEL AVIV 2106
[1](#)B. JERUSALEM 1324

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Israeli immigration practices are limiting West Bank enterprises' ability to conduct business, according to contacts working on the planned Rawabi housing/commercial estate. Because only companies and NGOs registered in Israel can apply for Israeli work permits, West Bank companies, like Rawabi, cannot get work permits for their non-Palestinian consultants, employees, or investors. This restriction forces overseas hires to enter the West Bank on tourist visas, subjecting them to the risk of deportation. The continued use of the "PA only" stamp at Allenby (reftels) further limits the employees' travel and effectiveness.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Summary continued: An American Citizen employee of Rawabi was recently delayed and questioned for eleven hours at the Allenby crossing before being permitted to enter. Although she informed Israeli officials that her job in Ramallah required frequent travel to Israel, she received a "PA-only" stamp. End summary.

Eleven Hours at Allenby

[1](#)3. (SBU) Upon returning from Amman in early October, a 23-year old Amcit employee of Rawabi developer, Bayti, was delayed and questioned for eleven hours by GOI officials at the Allenby crossing. She said she told them she worked for a private company in Ramallah, owned by Bashar Masri, and that she had left Israel to Jordan so as not to overstay the terms of her three-month tourist visa. During the course of the day, she claims to have been informed that the Ministry of Interior intended to arrest her for immigration violations and/or deport her.

[1](#)4. (SBU) She claims that different Israeli officials argued (in front of her) about what to do with her, noting that she worked for Masri, who is well known to GOI officials who work on West Bank economic issues. After many rounds of questioning, she was given an entry stamp restricting her travel to "PA-areas" only. She reiterated that her work requires regular travel to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv for meetings with Israelis, but was rebuffed. Fearing deportation, she says she accepted the "PA-only" restriction and will abide by it, despite the fact that it hampers her ability to do her job for Rawabi.

You Need a Work Visa (But Can't Get One)

[1](#)5. (SBU) Over the course of her eleven hours at Allenby, the

Amcit (who has no family ties to the West Bank or Gaza) was repeatedly told that she was "working illegally" in the West Bank, and that she needed to get a "work visa" and "stop pretending to be a tourist." She says she clarified that she has always been upfront about her work in Ramallah, and she asked the MOI official what the process is to secure a work visa. She claims he did not reply.

16. (SBU) Negotiations Support Unit (NSU) Legal Advisor Hala Rashed clarified that there is no documentation that will satisfy all elements of the GOI at the Israeli-controlled points of entry other than an Israeli work visa. However, she said, to get a work visa, she said, the company or NGO in the West Bank must also have a branch in Israel, which can secure Israeli work visas for its employees in the West Bank. As a result, she said, such visas are "virtually ungettable" for foreigners working in Palestinian companies.

17. (SBU) Contacts working in Ramallah confirmed that the customary practice is to go to Amman every three months, with proof of employment, and renew their visas upon re-entry. Rashed said her own "work visa" is actually a B2 tourist visa, which the GOI granted for six months upon reviewing her contract with the PA. Post is aware that another Amcit and former NSU advisor, Fuad Bateh, was not allowed to re-enter via Allenby on June 28 to return to his job at the Palestinian Water Authority. He was permitted to enter via Ben Gurion on September 23, after high-level intervention from the PA. Note: We know from other cases that "special treatment" for NSU employees is a result of the direct intervention of PLO Chief Negotiator -- and NSU boss -- Sa'eb Erekat. End note.

Comment

18. (SBU) The lack of clarity and flexibility at crossings for international workers in the West Bank, coupled with the continued use of the "PA-only" stamp, hampers the ability of companies and NGOs in the West Bank to hire and retain the talent they need. In the absence of PA immigration control over Palestinian areas, if there is a desire to promote foreign investment in the West Bank, Israeli practices at the crossings will need to allow for these types of workers and investors to travel and do their jobs. In this regard, post notes that the new instructions on the "PA-only" stamp promised (ref a) have apparently not yet been implemented consistently.

RUBINSTEIN